

LARSON ANNOUNCES MAJOR HISTORIC RECOGNITION FOR TOWN OF PORTLAND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 23, 2000

LARSON ANNOUNCES MAJOR HISTORIC RECOGNITION FOR TOWN OF PORTLAND WASHINGTON - The brownstone quarries of Portland, which gave rise to America's distinct "Brownstone Era," have officially become a part of the nation's history. U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today announced that U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, has designated the Portland Brownstone Quarries as a National Historic Landmark.

Earlier this year, Larson wrote a letter (attached) to the National Historic Landmarks Survey at the National Park Service to urge support for this designation for the Portland Brownstone Quarries. Last month, Larson toured the quarries with local officials.

Larson stated, "The Portland Brownstone Quarries have given so much to this country, both architecturally and geologically, so it is only fitting that they be honored for their place in America's history. In addition, it was a major source of employment for so many immigrants who came to this country with nothing but the strength in their hands and a strong work ethic. In fact, my great-grandfather, Lars Larson, an immigrant from Sweden, was employed there when he arrived in this country. The quarry made it possible for him and many others to pursue their dream of living in America."

Portland First Selectman Edward Kalinowski stated, "I would like to thank Congressman Larson for his support in helping us obtain this historic landmark. Also, Susan Decina and Nancy Mueller of the Portland Planning Department are owed a great debt of thanks for their efforts. I am absolutely thrilled with this news. What a great day this is for Portland, to have our town be nationally recognized."

A site recognized as a National Historic Landmark receives such a designation because of its historical importance to the entire nation and is already listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which recognizes only places of local or state significance. While the National Register contains more than 71,000 historic sites, only 2310, or roughly 3%, have been selected for landmark designation.

Nancy Mueller, Assistant Town Planner, spoke about the historical significance of the Portland Brownstone Quarries, "What is so wonderful about this announcement is that Alison Guinness, a resident expert on the quarries, started this process in 1992, and was assisted by Dr. Joanne Kaluessendorf from the University of Illinois' Department of Geology. This really is a great day because the quarries are such an important part of Portland's heritage. Not only because of the thousands of immigrants who worked there, but also because of the many dinosaur fossils that have been found. These fossils are in museums all over the country. And this designation is also important because of the architectural significance of the brownstone across the country during the 1800's. I thank Congressman Larson very much for his support."

Susan Decina, the Portland Planning Director, highlighted how this designation will compliment the many changes taking place in Portland, "The town has been working for years to receive this designation for the Portland Brownstone Quarries, and this comes at a great time. We are currently receiving guidance from the National Park Service on how to develop a Portland Brownstone Quarry Park, Portland and PRIDE are applying for the Connecticut Main Street Program this week, and we also received a \$50,000 state grant for a study that would determine the feasibility of turning the Portland Brownstone Quarry into a park and linking it to the Main Street area downtown. This designation is also so important to the people who live here. Having a part of your town be nationally recognized is just outstanding."

The Portland Brownstone Quarries were the main source of the distinctive reddish-brown sandstone called "brownstone," which was used so extensively in building construction during the latter half of the nineteenth century that this period has become known as the "Brownstone Era." Used for mansions and middle class houses alike, brownstones embodied the prosperous, progressive image of America during the period of national expansion and economic growth.

The quarries also are importantly associated with American geologist Paul Dimitri Krynine, who used data collected from the site in a definitive study to determine the geological origin of "redbeds." While "redbeds" were once thought to indicate only arid, desert-like environments, Krynine, relying on features in the Portland quarries, demonstrated in what is now classic geological work on their origin that they also formed under warm, humid, tropical conditions.

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March 31, 2000

Ms. Carol D. Shull, Chief

National Historic Landmarks Survey at National Park Service

National Register, History and Education

1849 C Street, N.W., NC 400

Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Chief Shull:

I am writing in support of the Portland Brownstone Quarries in Portland, Connecticut nomination for a National Historic Landmark.

These quarries are part of America's history and have been responsible in the construction of many of our country's landmark buildings. The stone removed from these quarries were used in buildings located in Chicago, Boston, New

York, Philadelphia, New Haven, and the capital of Connecticut, Hartford. Portland brownstone was considered to be of better quality than similar stone quarried elsewhere. This is evident in its use in New York City's Fifth Avenue residences and other landmark structures built with Portland Brownstone such as the Bank of North America in Philadelphia, the St. Marc Hotel in Washington D.C., the Plaza Hotel in New York City and many others.

The Portland Brownstone Quarries also offers everyone in this Nation the opportunity to glimpse at centuries past as an important piece in the study of Jurassic Period geology. These quarries represent a major piece of history for a region once covered by glaciers and subsequently carved out by the Connecticut River. The tracks of birds, dinosaurs, and even the remains of ancient trees have been found in the brownstone produced from the quarries.

These quarries not only provided the brownstone for buildings and offer a glimpse into centuries past, but also represent some of the first major employment offered in the Town of Portland. When the need for brownstone grew, so did the quarry and the work force. By 1871, Irish immigrants dominated the work force and soon thereafter, Swedish immigrants followed. In fact, my great-grandfather, Lars Larson, an immigrant from Sweden, was employed there when he arrived to this country. The quarry made it possible for him and many others to pursue the dream of living in America.

These quarries have an unparalleled identification in the growth of this country, in its first developments, construction, and its people. I hope that you will consider the importance of this application as you process the candidates for registration. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

JOHN B. LARSON

Member of Congress

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